

INFORMATION REPORT

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SUBJECT Relative Position of Members of Ho Chi Minh Government; Pham Van Dong as Vice Premier

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1. Background. There was a reshuffle in Ho Chi Minh's cabinet during the summer of 1947. Among other changes, Pham Van Dong, formerly Minister of Finance, became Vice Minister of Finance. The post of Finance Minister was left open for a later nomination. Pham Van Dong, who probably received his political education in Hanoi, is one of the most prominent Communists in Ho Chi Minh's entourage. Vo Nguyen Giap, one of the most conspicuous of the Vietnamese Communists, resigned as Minister of National Defense but remained as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. Pham Ngoc Thach, previously Minister without Portfolio, was named Deputy Premier, a post which he filled chiefly abroad, serving as a roving ambassador (India, Burma, Ceylon, Thailand, etc.). Thach is regarded as a Vietnamese nationalist rather than as a Communist. His role as Deputy Premier and roving ambassador was largely window-dressing and he was mainly a "figurehead."
2. These changes in 1947 represented a general policy of honoring the Vietnamese nationalists and obscuring the Communists for the purpose of retaining and solidifying the support of the non-Communist elements in the Viet Minh. In addition this policy was aimed at avoiding any arousing of American hostility toward the Ho regime and possibly for the purpose of leaving the door open for a compromise with the French.
3. With much publicity and fanfare Vo Nguyen Giap was reelected Minister of National Defense in June 1948 and Ta Quang Bui was relegated to the post of Vice Minister. This apparent about-face on the part of the Ho Chi Minh regime coincided with a decision to drop all efforts to negotiate with the French who were violently opposed to Giap.
4. When Pham Ngoc Thach became Deputy Premier in 1947, many people erroneously believed that he was Vice Premier. At that time there was no public announcement of the nomination of a Vice Premier. It was considered impossible that such a post would be given to a known Communist such as Vo Nguyen Giap, Pham Van Dong, Tran Hui Lieu, or Le Van Hien. In 1948, at about the time Giap became Minister of Defense for the second time, Thach ceased to be publicly

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mentioned as Deputy Premier and was usually referred to as Minister without Portfolio or as chief of various governmental missions (mission to Phat Dien, an area in Tonkin where Catholicism is very strong and which has maintained a semi-autonomous status; a government "fact finding" mission to Cochinchina, etc.). Thach was also charged with the official reception of missions from Laos, Burma, etc.

5. During July and August 1949 Pham Van Dong's name has been appearing with increasing frequency in official publications with the title "Vice Premier for Cochinchina." This title apparently came to him gradually without any public announcement of his appointment or his confirmation by the Vietnamese parliament but rather as if it were already an accepted fact that he is Vice Premier and has been such for a long time.**
6. The inconspicuous elevation of the Communist Pham Van Dong to a post which is perhaps Vice Premier, more or less at the expense of the nationalist Thach, is in marked contrast to the publicity that attended the apparent promotion of nationalists at the expense of Communists in 1947 and to the publicity accorded Giap's resumption of the post of Minister of Defense in 1948. As it received comparatively little publicity, Dong's appointment does not seem to have any connection with a possible intention on Ho Chi Minh's part to drop his pseudo-nationalist policies. It is more likely that the real purpose of the appointment lies in the internal situation of the Viet Minh in Cochinchina. Several possibilities suggest themselves:
 - (a) It is rumored that the popular figurehead General Nguyen Binh is constantly in disputes with the Vietnamese administrative chiefs in Cochinchina, Hoa Van Thieu and Pham Van Bach. However, all three of these individuals are Vietnamese nationalists rather than Communists and it would seem unlikely that a prominent Communist such as Pham Van Dong would have been chosen to settle their disputes.
 - (b) The actual chiefs of the Viet Minh in Cochinchina are Communists Ung Van Khien and Nguyen Van Tay. There have been reports of a fairly constant conflict between the figurehead nationalist Nguyen Binh and the real Communist powers Khien and Tay. Part of Pham Van Dong's job may be the settlement of this conflict.
 - (c) Khien and Tay are Communist veterans, educated in Moscow, who owe personal loyalty to Tran Van Giau rather than to Ho Chi Minh. Giau has a much larger personal following in Cochinchina than has Ho Chi Minh. To settle this smoldering quarrel within the Communist Party itself would require the intervention of a man of the highest qualities: A highly reputed Communist with an impeccable political background; an individual having a high official position in the government and in the party; a highly accomplished and tactful diplomat. Pham Van Dong is all of these things. The advance of the Chinese Communist armies toward the borders of Viet Nam has probably strengthened the general position of Ho Chi Minh in relation to Tran Van Giau. Giau and his group were mainly educated by Communists in France and/or Russia. Ho's lieutenants were more usually educated in China and/or Russia. The attitude of the Soviets toward the hidden conflict between Ho and Giau is not clear. It may have to ultimately be the Kremlin itself that will decide or resolve the dispute between Ho and Giau. It may be that in order to prevent the necessity of such intervention and in view of the approach of the Chinese Communists, Ho Chi Minh now feels the time is ripe to seek a settlement with Giau and his followers. Giau may currently be negotiating with Ho's representatives in Annam. (In early August, the Viet Nam News Service announced that Tran Van Giau is in the Fourth Military Zone, Annam.)
7. The elevation of Pham Van Dong may also be intended as a counterweight to the power of Vo Nguyen Giap. Both Giap and Pham Van Dong are important Communists; both received their Communist education among the Chinese Communists; but their

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characters are different. Giap is an optimist and an extremist with a rather violent attitude toward the French, toward the Vietnamese nationalists, and toward his fellow Communists. Dong is neither an optimist nor a pessimist. He is a realist. He is an extremely hard worker and a skillful diplomat. Personally liked and respected by many non-Communists, Dong is probably Ho Chi Minh's closest personal friend. Vo Nguyen Giap is the only Communist who has had anywhere near the amount of personal publicity given to Ho Chi Minh. If Giap's popularity becomes too great, it may be difficult for Ho to control him. In such an instance, Dong would be an excellent counterweight. On the other hand, Giap has many enemies and if the approach of the Chinese Communist armies (with which Giap is rather closely identified) brings unexpected results of unpopularity in Viet Nam, Dong (whose connection with the Chinese Communists was less close and much less publicized) would be an excellent remedy. Whatever the immediate reasons for the elevation of Dong, and they are probably numerous, he will, in the future, play an increasingly important role in the Indochinese Communist Party, in the Viet Minh, and in general Vietnamese political affairs.

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Comment. The title Deputy Premier, formerly held by Thach, is Dai-bieu thu-tuong; the title Chief of Mission often applied to Thach is Dai-bieu chinh-phu; the title Vice Premier is Pho-thu-thuong.

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Comment. The Viet Nam News Service announced in mid-August the official appointment of Pham Van Dong to the post of Vice Premier. This announcement stated that Dong had been appointed by President Ho Chi Minh at a meeting of government leaders in July.

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